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Follow-up to the World Summit for Social Development and the twenty-fourth special session of the General Assembly: priority theme: review of the first United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (1997-2006)

Statement submitted by the Foundation for the Rights of the Family, a non-governmental organization in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

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THE FAMILY AND POVERTY

In 1989, the "Report of the World Social situation" of this Commission for Social Development, at its thirty-first session in Vienna, said "As families are important producers of food in Africa, the temporary breakdown of the family threatens the survival of individuals and the economic viabilities of communities and countries".

The vast distance between the dehumanizing situation of poverty and a remote administration system calls for intervening agencies; and there is no more effective go-between than the family, the safety net where the basic needs are met, even in situation of crisis: poverty, unemployment, delinquency, drug addiction, HIV/AIDS. Children, youth, the disabled and elderly members all benefit from a readily available network parallel to the State.

Population policies, family policies and family well-being are closely related to economic development and to raising the income level and the quality of life of the poor.

Greater attention should be focused on the family and on promoting awareness of the contribution to social development and social progress made by families the world over. A family dimension should be incorporated into all policies and programmes of action concerned with sustainable development. This family dimension should also be implicit in all documents related to poverty.

All over the world, families are as different as they are alike. The family is essential to the world's future, it is the cradle of the generations to come. Everywhere, its strength and weakness reflect the fabric of larger society. As the world's human relationship, the family has survived thousand of years, adapting to changing socio-economic conditions and the progress of humanity.

However, poverty, unemployment, urbanization, migration and forced shifts of populations have placed greater strains on the family. Parents are more likely than before to require assistance from third parties to reconcile work and family responsibilities. Despite their resiliency and strengths, families everywhere are under pressure and in need of support.

A DECLARATION ON THE FAMILY

Societies worldwide recognize that the family has a number of social functions and responsibilities. In fact, the family, historically and by definition, can be considered as the first private sector, with its adhering share of responsibilities, which, in turn, have their counterpart in certain rights.

The International Conference on Population (Cairo 1994) implicitly recognizes the rights of the family, alongside its functions, in Chapter V of its Programme of Action entitled "The family, its roles, rights, composition and structures".

The Foundation for the Rights of the Family feels that a declaration on family responsibilities, functions and rights would be an adequate follow-up to the tenth anniversary of the International Year of the Family.

The explicit articulation of the rights, functions and responsibilities of families can be a source of inspiration and a point of reference to supports families and create family-friendly societies.

We, therefore, suggest that an open-ended working group be created within the Commission for Social Development to review and extract relevant provisions on the family from national laws, international instruments and existing draft declarations.